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THE REVISION OF CREEDS.

PART II.

REV. DR. POTTER.

First. Is it not a fact that creeds differ greatly from the opinions of a majority, or at least of many, of the people who hold them?

Undoubtedly; nor is it surprising. If by the term "creeds" is meant, as I suppose it is, all symbols and formularies which in any age have undertaken to define religious belief; then it is to be remembered that many of these, and conspicuously those of the sixteenth century, were the product of particular religious movements, were meant to be protests against prevailing doctrinal errors, and were reactions from previous doctrinal excesses. But reactions are rarely just. It is almost of the very nature of protest to be extravagant and one-sided. It is rare in denouncing error that its opposite truth is temperately stated, or that the underlying half-truth which gives to error its power is adequately stated also.

And here we have one of the most fruitful sources of the defects of many modern formularies of faith. They are essentially fragmentary and one-sided. They were doubtless profoundly true to the men or the ages that produced them. But later ages have seen the truth more broadly and more justly, and later

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teachers have been unable to accept them *ex animo*, or teach them cordially.

And herein, too, we have the clew to the modern dissent between the pulpit and the pews. A Reformation symbol of the faith is lifted by the voice of a so-called ecclesiastical authority into the place of an infallible utterance. But time turns toward us its "seamy side." A new generation wins a clearer vision; a more profound scholarship reaches down to a truer exegesis; and then the teacher himself finds that he is a doubter. A great religious body, to which England owes a vast debt of gratitude, demands of its ministers that "before any minister is admitted into full connection, he shall give, in the presence of the Conference, a full and explicit declaration of his faith as to the doctrines taught by Mr. Wesley in his first four volumes of Sermons and his Notes on the New Testament."* I have the greatest respect for Mr. Wesley's Sermons and Notes, but I do not believe that the scholars of his communion to-day will care to pin their faith so implicitly as the above regulation demands, to the opinions and interpretations of a single individual; and one can at least sympathize with one of them who is said to have exclaimed, "If we must have a Pope, let us have a living and not a dead one!"

Second. Is it not a contradiction which is the cause of much disadvantage and injury?

Unquestionably. It is a grievous disadvantage to any teacher that he must seem to be affirming or holding dogmas which do not express his inmost belief, and it is inevitably injurious to any people to be bound by "Confessions of Faith" which they suspect their teachers of having outgrown, and which have no potential voice of authority to themselves. Any communion will gain enormously in power when it so re-adjusts its standards of faith that they shall eliminate things that have come to be recognized as of doubtful authority, and when, above all, it shall consent to distinguish between those things which "may be proven by most certain warrant of Holy Scriptures" and those others which are simply the echoes of theological controversies having no single point of contact with the profoundest convictions of the spiritual nature, nor any helpful or quickening relation to our common life.

* See Grindel's "Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism," pp. 14, 15 (5th edition).

Third. Should they not be revised?

It is doubtful whether such symbols of belief as I have referred to are susceptible of revision. You can not "revise" a preraphaelite picture of the Madonna. It was true to the hand and eye that drew it, but, however grotesque it may be to our vision, it will not be bettered by having a background painted in by Mr. Burne Jones, and a modern drapery introduced by Cabanel. We shall do better to hang it reverently in the picture-gallery of ecclesiastical history, where it will serve to show men what the ages that drew it believed, and where, underneath the quaint drawing and coloring, a reverent student may still see, shining through, a fore-gleam of some larger truth.

If creed-revision, as applied especially to the leading Reformation symbols, is virtually an impossible thing, it would seem to be an opportune question whether there may not be some earlier and simpler formulary to the use of which Christians of every name might wisely return? Is it asked, could there not be a convention of the various communions now existing in America, for the purpose of — what? putting their various symbols of faith in a hopper, and getting some residuum acceptable to all? To suggest such a scheme is effectually to dispose of it. But what is attainable, is :

(*a.*) A juster estimate of the purpose of a creed. It can not, from the very nature of things, be an exhaustive definition of the faith. If it attempt so much, it must inevitably run itself out into refinements of definition which make it unintelligible to the great majority, and, even when it is not unintelligible, "a burden too heavy to be borne." The (so-called) creed of St. Athanasius is a conspicuous illustration of this, concerning which it is sufficient to say that no such wide departures from primitive faith have ever discovered themselves in that daughter-Church which has discarded it, as are notorious in the mother-communion which has retained it. In all creeds which attempt much more than a simple *résumé* of facts fundamental to the faith and epitomized from the pages of the New Testament, there is a human element which must needs reflect the intellectual peculiarities, the degree of learning, and even it may easily be, the theological animosities of the age that produced it. And a creed will not serve its best uses if it includes these, for it becomes not a bond of union but a weapon of repulsion. It is not inclusive, but exclusive.

(*b.*) Again, it is not perhaps too much to affirm that what is to-day attainable is a more cordial, even if less formal assent to some simpler formulary. All Christians agree in accepting the New Testament, and there is a creed which is expressed in the very words of the New Testament, and of which its foremost Anglican expositor has affirmed (as expressing, it is to be presumed, something more than the mere opinion of a prelate of the Anglican Communion) that it is, "without controversy, a brief comprehension of the objects of our Christian faith, and is generally taken to contain all things necessary to be believed."* This creed is to-day accepted by every communion of Christians throughout the Christian world, and if it be objected that it is too vague and indeterminate to secure uniformity of doctrine and harmony of teaching among Christian ministers, and that more explicit and particular formularies are required to that end, then I ask, have they secured it? To speak only of my own communion, has the Church of England secured it, and are the names "Low Church" and "High Church" and "Advanced" and "Broad Church" only so many names for men who do not differ, and for schools which do not denounce each other as teaching deadly error or holding defective and unorthodox views of the truth? If any churchman is trying to comfort himself with this illusion let him read the "exchange of civilities" at the late English Church Congress, between Canons Hoare and Gregory.

But what is vagueness and indeterminateness in a creed? Greater and more helpful than any creed, it is to be presumed, is the personalty of Him in whom it is its office to affirm our belief; and a creed which concerns itself chiefly with the facts of his life and death and resurrection is certainly more likely to be serviceable than any other. For this, which is essential to this whole discussion, may not be forgotten; Christianity is supremely the words and life and spirit of Christ, and these may not be compressed or expressed within the compass of any creed or confession of faith whatever. But, while on the other hand it is true that what men call the Gospel is a statement of truths or doctrines that may be defined, as to their essentials, in words, and is essentially unchangeable truth, this unchangeable truth has been but slowly learned, even by its own disciples, and has been reached as men have advanced by degrees through the

* Pierson on the Creed, Int., p. 1.

mists of inherited superstition, "seeing through a glass darkly," to a better and fuller knowledge of its innermost meaning. What now will best keep them in this progress? A symbol which retreats from the person of the Founder of the Christian church to discuss the "hidden things" of God, or one which, leaving these till the dawn of a fuller light, affirms that simpler belief which binds the life of the church of to-day to the cradle and the cross of its Author?

It may be said that all this assumes the divine character of the founder of Christianity and the inspired character of those records from which the story of his life and death is drawn, and that these are among the very questions concerning which some Christian ministers and more Christian laymen are in doubt. For one, I do not believe it. Many a Christian minister may be transiently perplexed by the last skeptical book that he has read, and many more laymen may be loosened, now and then, out of an earlier and hereditary hold upon the substance of Christian truth. But such doubts concern, more often, the accidents of the Christian faith than its essence,—more often its modern or mediæval excrescences than its primary truths. The man who has power in the Christian pulpit to-day is the man who believes these firmly, and affirms them courageously, and such men had never so many attentive and sympathetic listeners as now. Doubt is a disease, of which there may seem to be many conspicuous indications in the air. But it is not an incurable, nor always a harmful disease, for out of it there is coming, for those who are to come after us, a simpler *Credo*, heartier and less intricate formularies of faith, and a more honest love and reverence for those masculine virtues, of which the longest creeds have often been the least prolific, but for which the world of to-day, weaker even in its morals than in its faith, is most of all waiting.

HENRY C. POTTER.

REV. DR. CROSBY.

I KNOW of no creeds differing from the beliefs of those that hold them, excepting in very small and unimportant points. I can speak for my own creed—the formulas of the Presbyterian Church. I know of no Presbyterian minister, or person

who does not accept them as an entirety, although they think that some of the wording might be improved.

The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland has, within a few years, published an addition to the Confession, in which they bring out more clearly the side of man's free will, and thus more completely represent the whole truth of Scripture. That addition I consider a very wise one. It does not alter the creed, nor contradict it, but completes it; and I should be glad to have the Presbyterian Church in the United States adopt it.

As regards the great subjects that have agitated the public mind of late, namely, the atonement of Christ by a sacrificial death, and the eternity of future punishment, I know of no Presbyterian minister in our country who does not accept them both; and I think that all the talk about making new creeds because of the errors of the old ones, is the talk of men outside of the church, or of worldly-minded men inside the church, who seek a philosophical rather than a scriptural religion. If you take the formularies of all the evangelical denominations, the only great difference that exists among them is the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism, which is, after all, very largely a metaphysical difference, and, as the results show in Arminian and Calvinistic Churches, has very little to do with the piety and the growth of the church.

The talk of the opposition of science to the received views of religion appears to me to have no deep or extended source. That scientific discoveries have helped interpret the Scriptures there can be no doubt; but that scientific discoveries have, in the slightest degree, contradicted the Scriptures I deny *in toto*. And the trouble arising from scientific teachings is a trouble that never touches the hearts of religious people. That will only be found to be a subject of discussion among those who are on the outskirts. The theories of evolution are only theories, so far as any general application of them is to be considered, and, like many other scientific theories, will probably be forgotten in another generation. The Bible and the creeds have been assailed in the name of science by worldly men in every age, but they have never been harmed and never will be.

HOWARD CROSBY.

REV. DR. THOMAS.

THE notion of any recently developed, serious, and widely prevalent discrepancy between creed and opinion in Evangelical Christendom is, in my judgment, greatly exaggerated. The Evangelical Alliance, representing the various denominations, adopted in 1846 a succinct statement of doctrine, since confirmed by the American branch, and which, as I understand, still remains their unquestioned basis of agreement. This statement is explicit and unequivocal in its affirmance of the views recently assailed. It attributes the Scriptures to the inspiration of God, rather than the aspiration of man, recognizing them as a revelation, and not an "evolution." It affirms the "utter depravity of human nature, in consequence of the fall." It insists on our Lord's work of atonement as an actuality. It affirms the finality and hopelessness of the condition of those who die in their sins, etc.

Probably this statement would be unobjectionable to the great mass of Protestant Christians. That a contrary view should to any extent be entertained, is due, in part, at least, to explicable causes, involving more or less misapprehension or confusion of thought. In the first place, dissent is, through its very eccentricity, more conspicuous than conformity. The ring of the battle-ax on the castle-gate is noisier than the waiting of the defenders within.

Then the swarming issues of the periodical press, largely dependent on the piquancy of their contents for success in the "struggle for life," both invite the utterance of novel views and give them a broader hearing. By this means silent and timid sympathizers are rallied at once to responsive utterance. This seeming spontaneity of outburst from many quarters is accepted as evidencing a still more general sentiment as yet unexpressed. The receding echoes of their own voices are mistaken by the orators for murmurs of applause. Forthwith that tendency to hasty generalization, which is the peculiar infirmity of fertile and sanguine natures, tempts the confident assertion that the whole world has changed front. Assertions and reiterations seem, somehow, at last to be transmuted into, or at least to supersede the need of, proofs, both in the mind of him who utters and of those who hear them. But they are not proofs.

It ought to be added that the great bulk of so-called "scientific" speculation on theological problems, though sometimes reckoned as complicated with the question in hand, has in reality nothing to do with it. Atheism, Pantheism, and grossly materialistic "Pottheism" (to subsidize Carlyle's grim joke), are not neo-Christian, but distinctly anti-Christian. They are interested, not in re-adjusting creed and faith, but in abolishing both.

It is fair to infer, too, from occasional public utterances, a certain confusion of mind as to the use of the term "creed" itself, and therefore as to what constitutes defection therefrom.

More strictly, though not so used in current discussion, the term belongs to the early and simple formularies, such as the Apostles' Creed. Sometimes it is assumed that Protestant Christendom has adopted some one elaborated statement as a standard of doctrine, which is not true. Sometimes it is implied that the Westminster Confession, in its entirety, including even the detailed Catechism, has been accepted as such a standard, which is still more unwarranted. It is even at times insinuated that failure to assent to the very *obita dicta* of Calvin is somehow a lapse from "creed," which is, of course, grossly absurd.

John Calvin carried into theology a lawyer's instinct for right lines and right angles. He tried by logical supplement to bring his scriptural deductions as nearly as possible to the pattern of the New Jerusalem, which "lieth four-square." But he did not try to substitute his for the Apocalyptic vision; and there is no curse on those who "add to" or "take from" his words.

That there must always have been some denominational differences in creeds is implied in the very existence of denominational lines. The Methodists were Arminian, the Presbyterians Calvinistic from the beginning. They are probably far nearer in faith now than at first.

There has always been some latitude of interpretation of particular words in Church symbols. The Lutheran and High Churchman interpret the word "regenerate" as referring to effective grace in baptism; the Moderate Churchman regards it as equivalent to "incorporated into the Church"; the Low Churchman and most others refer it wholly to an independent spiritual change.

The churches have generally had (to use the language of one of the earlier Confessions) "no itch to clog religion with new

words," nor any superstitious attachments to old ones that have, through perversion or obsolescence, ceased to serve their original purpose. The abandonment of a term, which is, in fact (no matter how perversely), commonly misconstrued, is not abandonment of the doctrine once taught by it, but taught by it no longer. It is exceedingly unjustifiable and misleading, however, to direct an assault upon such terms, without any explanation of their origin and historic use. For this not only suggests a sweeping repudiation of the whole underlying idea, but, by attributing a gross caricature of their meaning to the original use of the words, it fixes the stigma of stupidity, if not of hypocrisy, upon men who were in fact remarkably clear-headed and heroically sincere, and who are no longer here to answer for themselves. It is one thing to refuse to accept or circulate defaced or mutilated coin; it is a far different thing to insinuate that it was originally issued in that form. Much of the genius devoted to showing the fallaciousness of the Fathers' opinion that three might be mathematically one, and one, three, might have served the world in some better way had it been recognized that the word "person," used by them in reference to the Trinity, was only the Latin *persona* transferred, and did not yet import, as now, the notion of concrete and isolated individuality. The term "total depravity," likewise, ought to be fairly interrogated before being ignominiously pilloried as an intruder. "Depravity" should be construed in connection with its antithesis "original righteousness." It is simply, as the word itself etymologically means, "perversion," and by contrast with righteousness perversion from the right line. In that sense any divergence, however slight, would be "total"; for it would involve that "missing of the mark" which is implied in the Greek equivalent for the word "sin." "Totality," however, was insisted on as the essential postulate on which rested the necessity of the "new birth." Only when a man was persuaded that he was "dead in sin," and that "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing," according to the Scripture, would he abandon the hope that he might somehow "evolve" into the new life. Death has not yet been found so to evolve.

Regard ought further to be had in the study of creeds to their occasion and purpose. They were frequently controversial in aim, and so drew out into minute detail, and with an emphasis which, though not false, seems to us now disproportionate,

definitions of specific sections of doctrine. Damnatory clauses, sticking their muzzles out of frequent port-holes, betrayed their bellicose intent. Sometimes the political animus protruded, as in the early English Articles, which scarcely differed from the Popish, except in transferring a Popedom to England. Sometimes, as in the case of the seven churches in London, who describe themselves as "commonly but unjustly called Anabaptists" (their Confession having been issued in 1643, before the Westminster), the avowed purpose was self-vindication against misrepresentations.

This last confession may serve to illustrate the principle generally recognized in the adoption of modern creeds, and constituting the very core of Protestantism—viz., the disclaimer of any rivalry with, or authority independent of, the Scriptures. Its authors expressly declare their work to be incomplete, and beg any one to do them "that friendly part" to show them "from the Word of God that they see not." Creeds have ordinarily been meant, like lamp-posts, to hold up a light and show people the way. Both are perverted if used to hang people for getting out of the way.

How far, and by what method creeds may and ought to be revised it is not easy to say. In England, where ecclesiasticism is wrought into the governmental fabric, it would doubtless require an Act of Parliament. Corporate action would be required in the case of the Episcopal and other analogous organizations in this country. But the Baptist Churches, which have never had an authoritative denominational formulary, and the Congregational Churches, which have been in like case, since the Unitarian defection, are at liberty to re-state their views as often as they find new ones,—subject, however, to the social ban of dis-fellowship imposed by other churches for apostasy. To the question, therefore, whether there exists in the Baptist denomination, to which I belong, any conflict between the creed and the belief of the people, I reply that, for the reason just stated, such conflict is impossible.

I am inclined to think that many who are dissatisfied with present doctrinal statements would be but little comforted by any re-statement fairly embodying the actual sentiments of to-day. Under its multiform phases of utterance the body of Christian doctrine has steadily matured and grown symmetrical. Its parts are so inextricably interdependent, that the wrenching out

of any one will inevitably and manifestly wreck the whole. Its form and permanence are due, not to the creeds, but to the inspired word of God, which has created it and them.

For myself I have never thought uninspired re-statements of inspired statements so essential or serviceable as many others do, to whose superior judgment I bow. So long as the "green pastures" are green they are better than baled hay, and quite as safe for flock and herd. Specific statements of belief being human, must, like all things human, wax old and perish; but the beliefs themselves will abide, and the "things most surely believed" will remain true. For "*verbum Dei manet in æternum.*"

JESSE B. THOMAS.

REV. DR. PECK.

CREEDS are human, fallible, and uninspired statements concerning the doctrines and truths of an inspired Book. They are the record of the progress of human thought in apprehending and formulating the Divine thought. They can be, at best, only tentative and approximative declarations of the contents of the divine revelation. It is but natural that the human statements of the great truths of the Bible should be changed in their formulas, for these statements in any age are inevitably colored and clouded by the political, social, moral, and ecclesiastical conditions of the period. And hence the statements of any one age cannot presumably embody the maturer thought of a subsequent age. The largest value of creeds, except the Apostles' Creed, is in their historical record of the progress of human conception of the Divine truth. It is to be expected, therefore, that symbolic statements of the Divine doctrines will undergo modification, and many of them ought to be entirely recast.

As to the fact of an essential difference between the creeds and the opinions of a majority, or a large number of those who profess to hold them, there is no doubt considerable variation in some denominations, and the discord is creditable to both mind and heart. To our thinking, the larger part of whatever difference may exist between creeds and opinions will be found in the Calvinistic Churches.

In America for many years, and in England and Scotland for a shorter period, this revolt of opinions has been growing more

and more pronounced against many dogmas of Calvinistic creeds. In the churches just named are found the most complex and metaphysical creeds, attempting to interpret the Bible, only to make it sometimes harder to understand or to accept.

These creeds were formulated largely as apologies and defenses in a former state of the Church; also they were an attempt, by philosophy and metaphysics, to speak the unspeakable, to reduce the character, government, purposes, and mysteries of God to human terms, and then to compel men, under pains and penalties, to swear supreme allegiance to these man-made creeds. These long, minute, metaphysical creeds have had their day, and have gone, never to return. They are a galling yoke, that thinking men will wear no longer. An explosion has been avoided by permitting the believer to accept the creed "for substance of doctrine," in many churches.

That door will admit a mouse or an elephant. And the elephant has got in and is tramping around *ad libitum*. There is, doubtless, a loud demand for shorter, simpler creeds, for larger liberty to men loyal to Christ and godly in life, for less imposition of yokes, and for respecting the great Charter of Protestantism, "the right of private judgment." There is no warrant in the New Testament, in Christ and the Apostles, or in the primitive church, for imposing long creeds on men before allowing them to enter the church. In the case of clergymen, as denominations are constituted, if they accept authorization from a church, covenanting to preach her doctrines, they ought, when they cannot fulfill that contract, to be honest and manly enough to go out; and if they are not, the church ought to have self-respect enough to put them out. They made a contract to do certain work and no other. No man has the right to covenant to be a watchman in my house against burglars or fire, and then admit the burglars or set the house on fire.

But I assume that each writer in this symposium is expected to state the facts inquired about, as they exist in his own denomination more especially. Thus the field may be best covered. There never has been a schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church on the question of doctrines. Church polity and slavery have produced several divisions, but there has never been any marked divergence from unity of belief in the doctrines of the church. There never has been doctrinal divergence from our standards on the part of the laity, except in so far as that change has been

fomented and led by the preachers in local churches. This statement is probably largely true of other denominations as well. The laity in all churches are usually conservative and loyal, except in so far as they are inoculated with the heresy or liberalistic views of their religious teachers. For the people do not profoundly study or understand the differences and distinctions in creeds, but tacitly agree to accept the interpretations from their pastors. One reason for the absence of doctrinal heresies in the Methodist Episcopal Church (a reason more powerful, perhaps, than is found in most denominations) is that the creed of Methodism is in itself elastic and liberal. The laity are called upon to subscribe, upon baptism and reception into the church, to the Apostles' creed, and to answer this question: "Do you believe in the doctrines of Holy Scripture as set forth in the articles of religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church,"—which articles of religion are twenty-four. And while several of these articles are not of vital moment in the present age, and are practically obsolete, I know of nothing contained in them that any considerable number of persons in the Church would deny or question. The clergymen of the Methodist Episcopal Church, however, are amenable, not only to the articles of religion, but also to what are called the "standards" of the church, and they are to be judged in their orthodoxy or heterodoxy by their harmony or inharmony with the consensus of belief in the church. That there is any wide-spread heretical tendency among the clergy of our church is not believed. That there is more liberality and breadth in the statement of truth than formerly is not denied; but I am asked to speak more specifically concerning the three fundamental doctrines concerning which the public mind is chiefly interested at the present time, viz: the Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Atonement, and Future Punishment.

Concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact of inspiration, divorced from the method of inspiration, there is no decided doctrinal heresy in the church. The article in our creed concerning inspiration is so worded that any man who accepts the Bible as containing an authoritative and infallible revelation from God may hold the verbal, plenary, or any other theory of inspiration with perfect consistency. The article is as follows: "The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should

be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." The elasticity of this article as to the theory of inspiration, combined with the fact of belief in the authoritative and infallible revelation of the truth from God, has preserved our laity and clergy from any marked heresy touching the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Then concerning the atonement. As to the fact of the atonement made by Christ for the sins of the whole world, there is no variance, so far as we know, between our doctrine and the belief of our people. As regards the theories or philosophies concerning the atonement, *i. e.*, man's conception of how Christ's death made atonement, there doubtless is some diversity among our clergymen. On the vicariousness of Christ's sufferings and death for the salvation of all men there is substantial unanimity. The governmental theory of the atonement most largely prevails among us. A few may be inoculated with the Bushnellian or "moral influence" theory, but this has not, we judge, spread far or deep. The doctrine of the atonement in its orthodox statement is preached from our pulpits with fervor, and believed by the laity with confidence.

As for future punishment, there is no word about it in our articles of religion. A layman could be admitted into the membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, so far as our articles of religion go, or his subscription to creeds is required, who did not believe in future punishment. Nevertheless, as a fact, future punishment is distinctively an article of faith among our laity. But the relation of the clergy to this doctrine is different. Their orthodoxy is tested and measured, not only by the articles of religion but by the "standards" of the church, which standards do teach and declare the doctrine of endless future punishment. Hence, no clergyman who disbelieved, and preached his disbelief, in future punishment, or who preached a second probation, or restorationism, could maintain his footing among us. The case of the Rev. Dr. Thomas, of Chicago, is in point here. There are not so many sermons preached in the Methodist Episcopal Church specifically upon the doctrine of future punishment as in former years, but most decidedly the doctrine colors and tones the practical preaching of our pulpits. There is, however, more modification, or divergence of belief, on this point perhaps than concerning either of the others. Very few, if any, are known to hold tentatively, while not uttering it, the doctrine of a second

probation; while possibly some, in their recoil from the materialistic and literal teachings of earlier days concerning future punishment, may have accepted certain modifications of the doctrine, as, for instance, the conditional immortality of the soul, or the final extinction, after unknown time, of the wicked, as surmised by Archbishop Whately and Dr. Bushnell. There is no preaching, however, of the doctrine of restoration and second probation. The governing mind of the Church, both in the clergy and in the laity, is tolerant. Methodism has never preached that belief in a human creed was necessary to salvation, and yet the Methodist Episcopal Church is not a creedless, invertebrate church. The period of her greatest activity in doctrinal preaching was when she stood face to face with the Calvinism and Universalism of the earlier period, proving her right to exist by her distinctive teachings and by her emancipation of the people from the thralldom of dogmas offensive to reason and repugnant to the character of God. And it will be no assumption unwarranted by the facts to say that the doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, distinctively proclaimed in its earlier days, largely tended to modify and liberalize the beliefs of men, and to emancipate them from the sterner doctrines of the older churches. And if there is less of distinctively doctrinal preaching among us to-day in the line of dogma and controversy, it is because the faith of Christians generally in this country has largely approximated unanimity on fundamental questions. This fact is demonstrated in the frequency with which Methodist preachers are called to the pulpits of other denominations, and are accepted as pastors without the modification of a single doctrine which they formerly held. There are many evidences of growing unity and approximating uniformity of belief in vital doctrines among Christians; and while "a universal church" in one organized body is chimerical, if not undesirable, at present, nevertheless, the substantial unity of Christendom on the great fundamental doctrines of Christianity is becoming more and more manifest. The people care less for dogmas and more for practical piety. But all practical piety is informed by doctrinal truth, so that, if Christianity is less a skeleton of doctrines to-day, it is because practical religion has covered those bones with the sinews and flesh of Christian life.

Another explanation of the absence of dogmatic preaching is found, not in the intellectual indifference of the people to the

doctrines, but in the fact that the activities of business life, the insane rush and whirl and strain upon nerve and brain of men cause them to covet on the Sabbath such preaching as will be restful and helpful rather than wearying and controversial.

It would be no benefit to the Church of Christ to attempt to modify her creeds in deference to outside clamor, or to revise her doctrines in the vain hope to harmonize them with newspaper theology.

J. O. PECK.

REV. DR. KROTEL.

ASKED to answer the question whether there is any difference between the opinions commonly held by Lutherans and the creed they profess, I would say that such is not largely the case. There are differences in the Lutheran Church in regard to a closer or a looser adherence to the acknowledged creeds, although all parts of the Lutheran Church in this country profess to receive the fundamental creed of Lutheranism, the Augsburg Confession, *ex animo*. Luther's small catechism, which embodies the same principles, is the text-book for the instruction of the young, next to the Bible, in all our churches.

Of late years greater attention has been paid in the Lutheran Church to the creeds of the Church—the so-called symbolical books—than for many years before. The general tendency is to study them more thoroughly, and there is a general agreement all round as to the reception of the standards.

There is no discussion in our church on the subjects of the Atonement, the Inspiration of the Scriptures, and Future Punishment. All are agreed to adhere to the old orthodox position. I do not know of a solitary man of any standing who does not hold to the old views, or of a single article of an antagonistic character that has been written on those subjects in any of our reviews or periodicals. The scientific questions that have recently agitated many parts of the church—doubts in regard to the inspiration of the Bible, the relation of Science to Religion, the Atonement, Future Punishment, and so on—have not come up in our church at all. Such controversies have created no difficulty whatever among us.

About twenty-five years ago an attempt was made by several prominent men in our church to revise the Augsburg Confes-

sion by cutting out such parts as they thought belonged to a past age, and which the people were now no longer willing to receive. But the effort was a complete failure. It only led the ministers and the people to a united investigation of the old creed, and to a return to the old standard.

There is no necessity for the revision of the creed of the Lutherans. There has been published within the last year a new English translation of all the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church, by the Rev. Dr. Henry E. Jacobs, of Pennsylvania College, Gettysburg. I refer to this work because it has attracted very general attention, not only in our church, but in the theological world, and the fact that a book of that kind should be called for now in the church, and attract so much attention, is one of the strongest proofs that the Lutheran Church, instead of going away from her standards, is really coming back to them *con amore*,—the English branch particularly. This is all the more significant, because, if there has been any controversy at all in any direction, it has been largely among English-speaking people, owing to the fact that they had not access, in the English language, to the literature of the Church. That difficulty is being met, so that the English portion of the Church is rallying around the old standards just as much as the German or the Scandinavian.

G. F. KROTEL.

REV. DR. CHAMBERS.

IN the Reformed (Dutch) Church the difference between the accepted creed and the actual belief of the present generation is hardly appreciable; that is to say, in a hundred ministers there may be found two or three whose opinions would differ from the standards, and among the laity there may be a small number.

Modern scientific theories have had no effect on the popular belief among us. The great body of the laity do not know anything about apologetics. My opinion is that the ignorant washerwoman who is a Christian knows that the Bible is the Word of God, because, as we state it theologically, the Holy Ghost bears witness to her in and by the truth, and satisfies her own mind, and that is independent of anything outside. I do not hold that the plain Christians get their convictions of the truth

of Scripture from learned men. If such were the case their faith would rest upon the testimony of men, while it really rests upon the testimony of God.

In regard to Future Punishment I do not know of a single minister in the Dutch Church that doubts it, and the same is true of the old fashioned, sacrificial theory of the Atonement.

As to the Inspiration of the Scriptures, that dogma has never been formulated in the larger creeds. The authorities say that the Bible is the Word of God, and that its authors were inspired; but none of the creeds define what inspiration is, with one single exception, and that is a creed which never came into very general use. While I hold that there is a substantial agreement on the matter of inspiration among all our ministers yet, perhaps, they might not be able to agree upon the way in which they would set forth the doctrine.

There is no need of any revision of creeds, so far as the Reformed Church is concerned. The only possible exception to this statement has respect to certain expressions in the Office for Infant Baptism, where it has been proposed to make some modifications or explanations, in order to meet the case of a very few individuals in different parts of the church who, while thoroughly orthodox in all other respects, have some doubts upon these points, and therefore decline to make the confession required. That matter is now before the Church and will be settled in the course of the next year or two. But it is not supposed by anybody that, if an alteration is made, it will, in any degree, affect the doctrinal position of the Church or of its ministers.

I think it would be well if there could be a revision of the creeds of the Reformation,—not in order to modify their doctrine in any degree, but simply so to change the phraseology that it will not mislead any one. The explanations which I heard from my professors in Princeton and in New Brunswick many years ago I should be glad to have in some way introduced into the body of the creed, or subjoined to it.

I do not know how a creed could be revised with safety. A creed must grow. It cannot be manufactured, and it would be best to leave the matter to tentative efforts in the course of years, through which, probably, a desirable result might be gained.

TALBOT W. CHAMBERS.